


qII  
Vivisection  
Pamphlet

Cobbe, Frances Power The Right of Tormenting--..



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THE  
RIGHT OF TORMENTING ;

Being part of an Address delivered in Edinburgh,

August, 1881,

BY

MISS FRANCES POWER COBBE.

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Mr. Lecky observes that, "only during the present century have the relations of man to brute been brought within the scope of ethics." It is no wonder that such should be the case, for the sense of moral obligations towards alien races of men has only been developed in modern times. The old Jew had scanty mercy for the Gentile, the Greek for the Barbarian, and all the wild tribes of Africa and America still regard their neighbours much as dogs regard cats,—the Red Indian travelling hundreds of miles merely to destroy the villages of the inoffensive Esquimaux; and so on. By degrees, however, the blessed lessons of sympathy and mutual obligation have extended among civilized mankind, albeit very imperfectly, especially between races distinguished by the difference of colour. How many white men in America, for example, really recognise in full the rights of negroes? No wonder is it then that the idea of owing any duty or forbearance towards non-human creatures has only quite recently developed itself, and among the highest nations only. In the memory of men now alive, the pen of Sydney Smith occupied the pages of your great *Edinburgh Review* by scoffs and sneers at Richard Martin and Erskine for introducing the first Act of any legislation in the world against cruelty to animals; and that the state of things at that time needed such legislation, we have only to read one of the novels or tour books of the period, to satisfy ourselves. Horses were ridden and driven to death by every young "spark" who could afford to

hire one; dogs were used cruelly for draught, and tormented about the streets by brutal boys; cats were skinned alive; and the pious Alleyne recorded in his journal that he paid thirteen pence to afford his friends the pleasure of "Whipping the Blind Bear!"

Now it is my contention that the physiologists, immersed in their studies, have just *stopped at this point*. They are not *before* the age, as they would have us think, and in the "foremost files of time," but they are *behind* it,—at the same moral level as the lower orders were generally in England eighty or a hundred years ago.

Meanwhile the rest of mankind have morally advanced, and in no direction more markedly than in that of a newly awakened sense of the duty of kindness to animals. But this sense is as yet vague and scarcely formulated, and we all feel when we reflect on the subject, that the nature of that duty and the limits of our rights are exceeding difficult to define. Bishop Butler's great axiom (which cannot be too often called to mind)—that on the simple fact of a creature being *sentient*, *i.e.*, conscious of pain, arises our duty to spare it pain—forms the broad basis for all we have to build. But I confess I heartily wish that that noble thinker—the greatest name in the great Church of England—the man, be it remembered in this connection, who said he found no reason why animals should not be immortal,—I wish that this man had gone further, and helped us to define better where to draw the line between cruelty on the one hand, and on the other such impracticable tenderness as that which would spare noxious insects and parasites, and, indeed, establish the mistaken kindness of vegetarians altogether.

Pondering over these things for years, a method has suggested itself to me of testing the justice of our conduct in any particular towards the brutes. Let me venture to lay it before you, and if it approve itself to you, we may then take it with us and apply it to this grievous question of Vivisection. Let us suppose that there is an *Umpire* between man and brute—a disinterested and just spectator, who can alike understand the man's wants and needs, and the inarticulate cries of the humble brute. Such an Umpire, my friends, I believe, *does* exist, and I name Him, God; but for sake of argument with the physiologist it may be better to speak simply of a hypothetical umpire and referee. What sentence, I ask, would such a dispassionate Arbiter pass on our general conduct towards the lower creatures?

Let us suppose the man to say, "I wish to rear sheep, cows, swine, fowls. I will take pains that the species be multiplied; and each individual, so far as I can do it, shall be comfortably fed and sheltered, and supplied with the necessaries of a happy animal's existence for a certain number of months or years,—on condition that at the end of that time I am at liberty to take its life in the quickest and least painful way possible; a way far preferable to natural death by old age." Would the Umpire, on behalf of the animal, accept of this bargain? There can be no question he would freely sanction it.

Or suppose the man to say, "I wish to rear horses to drag my plough or carry me on their backs, and dogs and cats to guard my property and be my own fireside companions. I will give them amply sufficient food and water, and I will not overwork my horses, or cause my dog's life to be miserable by chaining it constantly like a criminal. They shall be mercifully killed if at any time their lives become burdensome." Again the Umpire would surely say, "So be it."

Here, then, all our relations to the domestic animals are sufficiently

covered and sanctioned. We have only to fulfil our side of the implied contract of careful provision for them while they live and a quick death at the end, to feel that our use of them is morally right, and such as cannot offend their Maker and ours.

Then we have to consider the case of wild animals ; and, regarding some of them, the man may say, "They and I are natural enemies, and must always be in a state of war. I must kill them in defence of my life if they be lions or wolves, or in defence of my property or health if they be vermin or parasites."

Again the Arbiter says : "It is well ; these creatures would prey on you if you did not prey on them. You are within your rights in destroying them."

The last case is more difficult. It is that of wild animals, such as really wild game and fish (I am not speaking of deer and pheasants whose case is the same as that of cattle), creatures on which we have conferred no benefit and which threaten us with no hurt if we leave them alone, but which we kill for food. The man pleads, "I need food, and in devouring these animals I only take my place among the carnivora of the world. Nearly all of them live upon other and smaller creatures. Why should my life, the most valuable of all, not be sustained at the cost of theirs ? I engage to kill them as quickly as possible."

The answer to this, I believe, would still be acquiescent, though, perhaps, less completely so than in the former cases. Man is here not the lord of the world, but merely a link in the chain of animal life. A clear limitation, however, exists in the terms of the authorization. It must be *bonâ fide* for use that the harmless wild creature is deprived of life, not killed for the pleasure of killing—as people shoot seagulls by the shore, or pigeons in the disgusting matches at Hurlingham.

Lastly, we come to quite another problem. The man says, "I wish to vivisect an animal. Up to this hour we will suppose its life has been well cared for, and it has, on its part, served and loved mankind as its powers permitted. Now I wish to tie it down on a vivisecting table, and ascertain, by cutting it open, various interesting facts of science likely to be more or less useful by-and-bye. Its death will not occur for several hours, and in the interval (if the truth be told), it will suffer excruciating agony. Nothing can comfort it, for it knows nothing of the hopes and faith which have sustained human martyrs on the rack. It will feel only that the men whom it loved as if they were gods, have turned to become its tormentors. Utterly helpless, bound, and gagged, and, perhaps, paralysed with *curare*, it will lie for hours on its torture-trough till my mangling work on its flesh, and bones, and nerves, and brain is fully and slowly accomplished ; and then it may be suffered to expire.

What does the Arbiter say now ? The lives of the animals in all the other cases we have supposed were—taken as a whole—a joy and blessing, and their deaths were not more painful (generally much less so) than the natural deaths of old age or disease. But the vivisected creature's whole existence has been turned into a misfortune and a curse. The hours of its keen and excessive agony outweigh immeasurably all its poor little harmless joys of food and sunshine, and the love of its master and its offspring. It were well for that creature had it never been born. Does the Supreme Umpire then view such things and sanction them ? Can we for a moment suppose him to pass sentence justifying the vivisector ? Nay, my friends, it seems to me that a heavy, heavy condemnation must fall on such tyrannous misuse of human power, and that the voice of every unbiased conscience must

pronounce such vivisection a moral offence in the forum of ethics, and a heinous sin before the judgment-seat of God.

This is one view of the case. In another way we may look at it, and note that one of two things must hold. Either Bishop Butler's axiom is false, and a creature, although sentient, has *no* right to be spared pain, and the whole brute creation has absolutely *no* claims at all upon man, who may act to them the part of a devil without offence; or else, at the very least, man is forbidden to inflict on any animal a torture worse than death. That is the very *minimum* to which we can reduce their claims, if they have any claims at all. Taking their lives is the last stretch of human rights; making their lives such a curse as that they had better have perished at their birth, is a step far beyond killing them, and one which stands condemned an any principle which we can formulate, except the renunciation of all duty towards them. That vivisectors and their supporters do practically regard animals as having no rights as against man, and that they think *la loi du plus fort* all that is needed for the justification of their cruelties, is unhappily too evidently the real state of the case, albeit not a few of these tormentors are actually members of societies (and in one notorious case, a Vice-President of a Society) for the prevention of cruelty to animals!

You will observe that all these arguments concern the question only of *excessively painful* Vivisection. It is the infliction of torture which stands condemned by what we have said. That is the first thing. Now I shall tell you why we think that Vivisection, even when it does not inflict torture or severe pain, ought to be forbidden by law, and why the whole practice ought to be totally prohibited.

Assuming that we have proved that the infliction of torture is a moral offence, the corollary follows that, if vivisection cannot be sanctioned without opening a door to that offence—if no line can be drawn between the experiments *per se* almost harmless and those involving gross cruelty—if no protection can be given to an animal once it is laid on the vivisection table in a laboratory—and no guarantee can be obtained of a vivisector's mercy—then the whole practice ought to be stopped. If it be found impossible to separate the use of a thing from the abuse, and that abuse amount to a great moral offence, then it becomes needful to prohibit the use. Your Scottish Society and several English societies stepped before us in Victoria Street, in demanding, from the outset, the *total* prohibition of vivisection; while we only asked for "the utmost possible protection to animals liable to vivisection." But, though personally I have been always working towards the higher and completer end, I think we may all rejoice that the Victoria Street Society tried the more moderate demand in the first place; and that thus, without fear of being deemed hasty, or hot-headed, or *doctrinaire*, it has exhibited the spectacle of a band of men of high political and social importance, *des hommes sérieux*, in short, driven on by the logic of facts and the lessons of experience, taught by infructuous legislation and delusive Returns, to quit their original standing ground, and raise their demands to the absolute suppression of the practice which cannot be curbed within the bounds of humanity. The speeches which were made at our meeting of this summer—which you all may read in the Reports on our table—will show you why men so little likely to be borne away by impulse, and differing so widely from each other politically and religiously as Lord Shaftesbury, the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, and the Lord Chief Justice of England, yet have one and all come round to the same unhesitating conclusion—that *Vivisection must be totally abolished*.

The practical fact is that Vivisection is a *method* of research—a useful method, we must presume, in the opinion of those who employ it, a misleading



one in our opinion and in that of many better competent than we to judge the matter. Now a *method* like this cannot be pursued half-and-half; employed to a certain extent and then dropped or exchanged for another. It must be maintained *as a method*, or stopped *as a method*; and the labours of physiologists turned into the other and, as we think, more truly scientific channels of clinical and microscopic observation. There is no compromise really possible. The idea of the Royal Commission of the "reconciliation of the claims of science and humanity" was wholly delusive. Science ignores humanity, and will be "reconciled" with nothing which stops her invasions.

And, after all, is not this just what might have been expected? How should it be otherwise? How should such a monstrous idea of our relations to the animals as lies at the root of Vivisection be reconcilable in any way with true feelings of sympathy and humanity?

Hitherto I have been discussing the question from the barest and coldest ground of pure ethics. But there are some animals to whom we men and women stand in relations, which it is impossible to reduce to a hard moral question, even as it would be to discuss as a mere matter of right and wrong the cruel treatment of some dear little child. If I saw a little blue-eyed, fair-haired baby crowing in the sunshine, and holding up its little arms for my embrace, and a wretch of a nurse were to come and deliberately knock its hands on the stones, I should not, I think, require to appeal to ethical arguments to satisfy myself that the nurse was doing wrong; or to induce me to rush forward and save the baby, and pitch the nurse to Jericho—or further. In a similar way we who have made pets of our dogs, or horses, or cats, or even our poor little guinea-pigs and rabbits and doves, when we think of them as kept for days in a vivisection cellar, then brought out into the daylight of the laboratory—trembling and terrified—piteously, perchance, begging for mercy, but thrown on the torture-trough, tied down, gagged—only the speaking eye still pleading,—then slowly carved alive, the nerves dissected out, and all the horrible apparatus of science brought to bear on the poor little quivering frame, which used to respond so lovingly to the caress of our hand,—when we think of this, I say, we do not need to go over all the moral reasons which prove that such deeds stand condemned by God's eternal law. We feel,—well, it is better not to say what I, for one, feel towards the smooth, cool man of science who stands by that torture-trough. Is it wrong to feel so? Nay; but I should be a miserable wretch if I failed to feel it towards a creature who has loved me and on whom I have bestowed affection. Remember this: If Vivisection is to be tolerated at all—if we are to regard the dog (for example) as the two thousand doctors expressed it in their Memorial to the Home Office in 1875, as "*a carnivorous creature, specially valuable for the purposes of research*" (*i.e.* to be carved alive to satisfy scientific curiosity),—then we must, for very shame sake, and to prevent our children from becoming cynical hypocrites, stop at once all talking and teaching of sympathy and love to animals. If we are going to give up the poor brute to be dissected alive, then, in Heaven's name, let us try to think of it as a mere automaton, a senseless bit of animated matter, which can have no feeling, no intelligence, no faithful affection. To admire its intelligence and its fidelity, and lead our children to caress it and to note all its beautiful instincts, and *then* to deliver it to the tormentors, that is something baser and more odious than the perfidy of an Eastern tyrant. It is only because of our utter ignoring of the claims of the brutes which prevents us from feeling sick with disgust at such cold-blooded hypocrisy. Let us fancy superior beings—angels, or God himself—treating *us* in like manner; accepting our humble services, drawing forth our adoring love and fidelity, and then, coldly consigning us to the torture chambers whence we shall never escape! Truly when we think of these things the awful words seem

to sound in our ears—"With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

I have, I hope, said enough of the reasons why we ask for the total prohibition of Vivisection, on grounds of morality, and of natural, honest human feeling. As I said at starting, if we prove the practice to involve a great moral offence (perhaps I ought to say more exactly, is so inextricably connected with a great moral offence as that it is practically impossible to sanction it and yet avert the offence), then the exhibition of the fortunate results which might be expected from the practice, is irrelevant. If we have no right to invade a defenceless country which lies at our mercy, it would be deemed cynically immoral to write leading articles and make parliamentary speeches, to show how much plunder we might obtain by ravishing it.

But our opponents, who are almost to a man Utilitarians, if not Agnostics, are by no means willing to settle the question on the grounds of simple deductive morals. For a large benefit to the human race, they will generally contend that almost anything is justifiable; and certainly such a small thing in their account as the torture of animals. In short, not a few of them talk grandiloquently of their *duty* to vivisection, in the "sacred cause of humanity;" and bid us stand by and admire their deep sympathy with human suffering, which makes them sacrifice all their own tender sentiments of compassion to animals in the hope of bringing some relief to the sick bed from the laboratory. Thus, then, we are brought up short out of what, I suppose, they would call the high *priori* road of discussion, and challenged to say whether Vivisection, even if it be a wrong to the brutes, is not such a service to man as amply to justify its professors in disregarding the lesser obligation. As this line of appeal reaches many good and conscientious hearts, and has been fortified by Dr. Darwin's solemn denunciation of Anti-vivisectioners, as persons who would sacrifice the great interests of the human race to mistaken sentiment, I feel bound to confront it straightforwardly and carefully.

My friends, do not be afraid that you will sacrifice the interests of mankind by stopping the torture of animals. Those interests never can, and never will, while God reigns on high, be furthered by cruelty and wrong. We need never fear that we relinquish any real good for our race by following out the dictates of justice and mercy. It is an *impious* doctrine; I say it deliberately, an *impious* doctrine, that God has made it any man's duty to commit the great sin of cruelty by way of obtaining a benefit for suffering humanity; or the duty of the community to sanction such cruelty for its own benefit. After all, what are these boasted benefits to be obtained by Vivisection? I do not deny that a remedy for any of the diseases of our fleshly tabernacles would be a great benefit; but, I say, that even for that, the price of hardened hearts, and blunted sympathies, and intellects trained to the passionless registration of agony, would be too heavy a price. I do not believe in the cures said to be effected by help of Vivisection. When we sift any of these stories so often dinned in our ears, we usually find, either that the doctors have only found out, like Pharoah's magicians, how to *cause* the disease, but not how to cure it; or if they have really found a cure or an improved mode of treatment, it has been by methods which—as Dr. Clay says of his most famous operation, "have no more to do with Vivisection than the Pope of Rome."—(*Brit. Med. Journal*, July 17, 1880).\*

But even if I be mistaken; if Vivisectioners have already made or shall hereafter make discoveries, tending directly and importantly to relieve our bodily

\* The operation claimed by the Bishop of Peterborough in the House of Lords as the great triumph of Vivisection, and of which Dr. Clay was the originator.



pains; even *then*, would Vivisection, I ask, stand justified? Not so, my friends, assuredly. Bodily health, relief from pain, prolongation of life, are not the only or the greatest good to be sought for man. The arguments which these doctors, and, alas! several Bishops also, adopt, all rest on the crude, stupid, *heathenish* assumption that the moral interests of mankind are not worth considering, and the physical interests are all in all. The unexpressed major term of the whole argument of the Bishop of Peterborough, as I heard him in the House of Lords, was this—"That a practice which, in the opinion of experts, conduces to the bodily health of one or more persons, becomes, *ipso facto* morally lawful and right." I leave you to reflect on the consequences of the adoption of this principle in the present state of medical opinion, and the sort of practices which would be lifted accordingly from the rank of Vices to Virtues!

Yet, if this major term be unsound, the whole argument of the lawfulness of Vivisection deduced from its supposed beneficent results falls entirely to the ground. The Inquisitors of old took really higher ground when they professed to burn a few heretics in *the immortal* interests of mankind, and to save, not merely this life, but the life hereafter from destruction.

I often think, however, that we are very "soft" as regards these Vivisectors, when we listen to their pretensions to zeal for the benefit of humanity as justifying their disgusting pursuit. These English *augurs*, like those of ancient Rome, must smile, when they find one another practising on the gullibility of the public. Foreign physiologists—to one of whom our home-bred tormentors subscribed the other day to raise a statue—do not think it worth their while to make pretensions to such a sublime and Prometheus-like Enthusiasm of Humanity. Dr. Hoggan tells us they have no such hypocrisies, and that they laugh at such an idea in the great laboratory in Paris, where he witnessed such reckless cruelties; and Dr. Herman, of Zurich, frankly wrote in his famous pamphlet (*Die Vivisections-frage*), "The advancement of our knowledge and not practical utility to medicine is the true and straightforward object of all vivisection" (p. 16). I do not deny that there may have been here and there a vivisector who loathed his work (as any man with a heart in his bosom must loathe it), and yet occasionally performed painful experiments in the ardour of scientific research. Such a man, I believe, was Sir Charles Bell. But few and rare are the experiments such a man would or did perform; and often, like your own great Dr. Syme, they would end by repenting all they have done, and denouncing the practice. But if you tell me that Claude Bernard baked his seventeen dogs in a stove, and Mantegazza larded his forty animals with nails, and Schiff tormented his fourteen thousand dogs, all with compunction and regret, and such pain to themselves as any one with natural unperverted feelings would experience, then, I say, simply, "I don't believe it." I consider the pretence that they did so as one more of the tolerably numerous,—shall we say illusions?—of which a certain "noble profession" will some day be ashamed.

So much for the supposed *motive* of Vivisectors, which (I have heard it argued) may nullify the deadly moral consequence of a life spent in the work of torture. We Anti-Vivisectors are sad sceptics. It is true that we almost to a man believe in God, and in such a thing as Duty; but then, we somehow do not believe quite implicitly in physiologists! We think a man who will bake, and burn, and lard with nails, and dissect alive, harmless, and helpless creatures, is possibly capable of cloaking his hateful proceedings with a mantle of philanthropy when he is talking to the mere Philistine lay-public. We think that a man who freely chooses for himself the life-work of a Familiar of this modern Inquisition; a sworn Tormentor of the new Question Chamber; a man who devotes his few

years under the sun, in God's bright world, to the task which the imagination of a Dante has given to the Fiends in the pit of darkness—we think, I say, that that man's soul suffers under more deadly disease than the palsies and cancers for which he vainly pretends to seek the cure. For my own part, I say, and I think you will all say with me, Let me bear the burdens which God may lay on me, and die when to Him seems good. But let me go out of this life of shadows into the eternal world, able to think it would not be an implied *curse* I should invoke on my soul were I to desire, like Theodore Parker, that over my grave should be read the words, "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain money."

Office of the Society for the Protection of Animals from Vivisection,  
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### A PROBLEM.

Impromptu lines upon a remark with reference to vivisection, "but they have no souls."

Come Carlo, dear four-footed friend,  
And look at me that I may trace  
Once more that glance of loving light,  
Which lends such beauty to thy face.  
But whence it comes, and what it means,  
Can take small place in Nature's roll;  
Thy gaze is but atonic play,  
For Carlo, dear, thou hast no soul.

Give me thy paw; 'tis trustier far  
Than many a hand of human mould;

And greet me with thy honest tongue  
Which never a *human* lie has told.  
And yet thy steadfastness and truth  
'Twere idle folly to extol;  
They're only matter's fleeting form  
For, Carlo, dear, thou hast no soul.

There let my vivisecting knife  
Slow make thee, dumb, and maimed, and blind;  
Thy torture weighs not in the scale,  
Matter must be the store of mind.  
Ah! God, that look; that piteous cry,  
What is this thought beyond control?  
Can Science be a cruel lie,  
And faithful Carlo *have a soul*?

—L. H. E. in *London Zoophilist*.



